

TO MEET SPAIN'S SQUADRON

STRATEGY BOARD WORK OUT PLANS OF OFFENSE AND DEFENSE.

Our Vessels to Be So Positioned That They Can Intercept the Enemy's Ships Whether They Come to the West Indies or Off Our Coast—Ocean Fire to Be Sent Out as Soon as the Enemy's Plans to Intercept the Spanish Squadron.

WASHINGTON, April 29.—News that the Spanish fleet had sailed to-day from St. Vincent, Cape Verde Islands, brought to a head the plans of the Navy Department for meeting such an emergency. Every arrangement has been made for a great naval engagement. Fast cruisers of the United States will scour the sea for the appearance of the Spanish squadron, and when the enemy is sighted will rush back under the highest steam pressure to the nearest port to send notice of its approach. Admiral Sampson will concentrate his six armor-clad ships in anticipation of orders to move from Cuban waters to some central point on the Atlantic coast, whence he can reach quickly the northern or the southern coast.

Work on Commodore Hewell's patrol squadron will be rushed with even greater energy, so that the six vessels composing it can start out to perform the duty assigned to them. Commodore Schley's flying squadron is an auxiliary quantity in the preparations for outmaneuvering the Spaniards. Two of his vessels, the Columbia and the Minnesota, will act as scouts off the northern coast, but the intentions of the Government in regard to the three armor-clad ships under his command now at Hampton Roads—the Brooklyn, the Massachusetts, and the Texas—are not disclosed. It was reported to-day that these three formidable vessels would put to sea to-morrow, but no verification can be obtained here.

The United States Consul at St. Vincent must have been a busy man to-day. He is the person who sent the reports about the departure of the Spanish fleet. As there is no other United States officer at that place, the dispatches received here presumably came from him, although neither the State Department nor the Navy Department will say so. The first official telegram came early in the day. It said that two cruisers and three destroyers had left St. Vincent at 7 o'clock this morning. Several other telegrams from the same source arrived rapidly in succession. Each notice was more definite than the previous one, but the last one told the straight story. According to the final dispatch the four armor-clad cruisers in the Spanish fleet and three torpedo boats, presumably the destroyers about which so much interest has been shown in this country, sailed in a westerly direction. The fleet consisted of a cruiser, a transport, and three torpedo boats, took a northerly course.

West from the Cape Verde Islands lie the West Indies and the coast of the United States. To the north are the Canary Islands, owned by Spain, and the Spanish coast. Judging from the information received at the State Department, the division of the fleet which sailed north is returning to Las Palmas or some other Canary port, while the real fighting strength of the Spanish force is on its way to meet Admiral Sampson's squadron or to make an assault on Atlantic cities. The Atlantic seaboard. Interesting strategical possibilities are involved in the movement of the four armor-clad vessels and the torpedo boat destroyers. The Navy Department has made its plans to meet whatever emergency is presented, and the strategical possibilities of the Spanish fleet are so arranged that they will be able to place the formidable squadrons of the Government that no apprehension need be felt as to the result.

There are several things which the naval strategical board have had in consideration in arranging their plans. Steaming up the east coast of South America to Rio de Janeiro, the battleship Oregon is engaged in the race against time, which began at San Francisco on March 10, to suggest Admiral Sampson's squadron. With her in the gulfstream Marietta. None of the arrival of these two vessels is expected any day. From Rio to Pernambuco the distance is something more than 1,100 miles. Pernambuco is the first danger point of the Spanish fleet. It is only 2,610 miles from St. Vincent to that place, and the Spanish fleet is expected to arrive in five or six days, going at moderate speed, in order to economize their coal supply. The greatest danger of danger to the Oregon is between Pernambuco and Para, the latter point about 1,600 miles from St. Vincent. It will be seen that the Spanish fleet is expected to arrive at the mouth of the Amazon and destroyers intend to intercept the Oregon and the Marietta, and the American vessels keep right along up the coast without stopping at Rio, the two opposing forces would meet somewhere off the Brazilian coast within the radius of danger to the Oregon. The Oregon and her consort will stop at Rio for coal, and there will find dispatches from the Navy Department telling them what to do. It is extremely probable that they will be joined there by the Brooklyn, the Massachusetts, and the Texas, which, with the Oregon, would probably be able to win the encounter with the Spanish fleet without any great difficulty, if it were not for the strength given by the three torpedo boat destroyers to the four Spanish armor-clad vessels. The strategical board has undoubtedly taken these little terrors into consideration in making plans for meeting the Oregon and the Marietta, and that these are deemed sufficient is evident from the confidence felt at the Navy Department that the American battleship and gunboat will fare all right.

Porto Rico is still held by the Spanish military forces, and its great value to Spain as a base of naval supplies and operations makes it quite probable that the squadron which left St. Vincent may be bound there. San Juan, the Porto Rican capital and principal port, is the only place in the West Indies suitable as a supply and operating base left open to the enemy. In attempting to reach it the Spanish squadron would be obliged to encounter Admiral Sampson's ships and a great battle would be fought. Its result might end the war, and would certainly mean the absolute vanquishing of the Spanish in the attempt to regain Cuba. If the squadron was defeated. With the three armor-clad ships under Commodore Schley's command and numerous protected vessels ready for service, a defeat of the blockading squadron would still leave the American Navy in pretty good shape to overcome the enemy.

Another contingency, for which preparations have been made is that the squadron bound west from St. Vincent will attempt to bombard cities on the New England, and perhaps the middle Atlantic, coast. The suspicious activity of the Spanish Consul at Halifax in buying large coal supplies there, and the action of the British Government in ordering two warships there to enforce its neutrality proclamation, have not been lost on the strategical board. The Spanish Consul's purchases may have been intended as a ruse, but the naval plan makers are not taking any chances. The programme they have mapped out to meet such an emergency and others that may be presented is said to be very complete.

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general plan to provide for the protection of the coast cities, without actually leaving the Spanish fleet in the blockading squadron, and at the same time provide for meeting the Spanish force in West Indian waters. The movements of the vessels concerned will be published and the Navy Department is not in the least apprehensive that knowledge of its plan will make any difference in its execution. In effect the new programme provides for withdrawing Admiral Sampson's six armor-clad, or some of them, to a central point on the Atlantic coast, there to await information of the probable destination of the Spanish fleet. The place of concentration is so situated that the armor-clad could quickly return to Cuban waters if needed there, or move with despatch to any northern cities in danger of attack. Meanwhile the blockade would be maintained by the cruisers, gunboats, and torpedo boats now off the northern coast of Cuba and Cienfuegos on the south, and the host of auxiliary ships which will be sent there as rapidly as they are converted into fighting craft.

Dovetailing into all these arrangements are other measures taken to guard against surprise. Orders were issued today by which the Navy's cruisers St. Paul, St. Louis, and Harvard will proceed to sea without any delay. That they have been directed to leave their present stations before taking on their main batteries indicates that they will not go on an expedition to capture merchant ships off the enemy off the coast of Spain. St. Paul is at Philadelphia undergoing the overhauling necessary to make her into an auxiliary fighting ship. The St. Louis and the Harvard, formerly New York, are at New York practically ready for service with the exception of their big rifles. It was said at the Navy Department that these three ocean grayhounds might get away to-morrow. They will do the same work as that assigned to the regular naval cruisers Columbia and Minnesota. All these vessels will make trips far out to sea, watching for the appearance of the Spanish fleet. They are capable of such great speed that no vessel owned by Spain could overtake them, except the torpedo boat destroyers attached to the squadron which left St. Vincent to-day, and as the destroyers cannot do effective work with their big rifles, a sea way, they are not feared by the big cruisers, except close in.

Besides the rapid-fire guns on the five vessels detailed for scout duty could make short work of the destroyers, which are not well armed. Their efficiency depends on their ability to overtake torpedo boats and in discharging torpedoes at large vessels. Just as soon as the Columbia or one of the other scouts sighted the Spanish ships they would turn tail and run for the nearest port where there is a telegraph station, and word would go to Admiral Sampson and the other American commanders of the expected approach of the Spanish fleet. The fleet would station with his armor-clad at Hampton Roads, for instance, he would be guided in his movements by the information from the scout. If the Spanish fleet were reported to be headed for the West Indies the big ships would start south under a full head of steam. If they were reported to be headed for the coast of South America, Admiral Sampson would proceed north to intercept him.

In anticipation of the arrival of the Paris at Halifax the Navy Department to-day sent orders to the commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard to have the work of converting the ship into an auxiliary cruiser as soon as she reached the yard. The commandant was told to put 6-pounders on the Paris at once and to utilize the whole working force of the yard and the ship to make her ready for sea. She will be the first of the auxiliary cruisers to be converted, but will be equipped on front duty when the work of conversion has been completed. When the Paris reaches Brooklyn she will become the U. S. S. Yale.

The Naval Strategy Board is in session nearly all day, considering plans of offense and defense. None of the members would talk about the probable intent of the Spanish squadron. One of them said that of course the board had its opinion on the subject, but he did not care to tell what it was. "You can figure it out for yourself," he remarked. "You know the Spaniards are coming. It is a matter of time. It is not a matter of whether." This was taken to mean that the four armor-clad cruisers and three torpedo boat destroyers have taken the southerly course which leads to the West Indies. It is much easier than the course to the northern coast of the United States, and far easier for the destroyers. One of the members of the board said that the Spanish fleet would not take a southerly course, but would take a westerly one, and would be bound to take a westerly one. Torpedo boat destroyers do not carry a large supply of coal and on the verge from Spain to the Cape Verde Islands they would be obliged to take a westerly course. They could carry enough coal, however, for making a long run at slow speed, and with extra loads for their use on the four armor-clad, may not suffer for want of fuel. After all, navy officers say that the Spanish fleet is expected to arrive in five or six days, going at moderate speed, in order to economize their coal supply. The greatest danger of danger to the Oregon is between Pernambuco and Para, the latter point about 1,600 miles from St. Vincent. It will be seen that the Spanish fleet is expected to arrive at the mouth of the Amazon and destroyers intend to intercept the Oregon and the Marietta, and the American vessels keep right along up the coast without stopping at Rio, the two opposing forces would meet somewhere off the Brazilian coast within the radius of danger to the Oregon. The Oregon and her consort will stop at Rio for coal, and there will find dispatches from the Navy Department telling them what to do. It is extremely probable that they will be joined there by the Brooklyn, the Massachusetts, and the Texas, which, with the Oregon, would probably be able to win the encounter with the Spanish fleet without any great difficulty, if it were not for the strength given by the three torpedo boat destroyers to the four Spanish armor-clad vessels. The strategical board has undoubtedly taken these little terrors into consideration in making plans for meeting the Oregon and the Marietta, and that these are deemed sufficient is evident from the confidence felt at the Navy Department that the American battleship and gunboat will fare all right.

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Porto Rico. It is not quite 900 miles from St. Vincent to the Canary Islands. The distance to Para and Pernambuco have been given. If the Spanish fleet have gone to any one of these places, it will be some time before they reach their destination, at least three days to the Canary Islands, five or six to the Brazilian coast, from eight to ten to Porto Rico, and from thirteen to fifteen to the New England or Middle Atlantic coast. There are naval officers of good judgment who believe that the enemy's squadron has started back to the Canaries or to Spain, but there is not one among them on duty at the Navy Department who does not fervently hope that the seven vessels have gone to meet the American ships under the command of Admiral Sampson.

All the lightships along the Atlantic coast will be withdrawn from their stations and brought into port so that they may be in no danger from attack by Spanish vessels or aid as guides to unfriendly navigators. The Lightship Board has considered the advisability of this action, and to-day issued an order to all hydrographic offices and maritime exchanges notifying them that after May 1 lightships must be moved without delay to the nearest port. All of these vessels are in exposed parts of the ocean, many miles from shore, and could offer no resistance to the smallest armed boat of the Spanish Navy.

THE SPANISH FLEET SAILS.

But the Torpedo Boats Have Already Motored to St. Vincent.

Special Cable Dispatches to The Sun.

ST. VINCENT, Cape Verde Islands, April 29.—The Spanish squadron sailed from here at 8:30 o'clock this morning. The torpedo boats Ariete, Rayo and two transports went north, presumably bound for the Canary Islands, the cruisers Vizcaya, Cristobal Colon, Almirante Oquendo and Maria Teresa sailed southward and their destination is not known. They took with them three torpedo boat destroyers.

ST. VINCENT, Cape Verde Islands, April 29, 7 P. M.—The torpedo boats Ariete, Asor, and Rayo and two transports have just returned here. The Ariete and the Asor came into collision and received slight damage. They will proceed to join the fleet to-morrow.

HOLLAND BOAT NOT YET ACCEPTED.

The Naval Board on Construction Say the Vessel Is Too Dangerous.

WASHINGTON, April 29.—No decision has been reached by the Navy Department in regard to the offer of John P. Holland's new submarine boat, named after himself, to the Government.

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt has recommended that she be bought. France is trying to get the unique craft, and Mr. Roosevelt believes it to be good policy to prevent her from falling into the hands of any other country. He believes that the Holland is worthy of a trial.

The board headed by Commander Sperry, which conducted experiments with the vessel at New York, recommended that she should not be purchased. So did the Naval Board on Construction, composed of the chief of the Navy Department, the chief of the Bureau of Construction, the chief of the Bureau of Equipment, the chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, the chief of the Bureau of Steam, the chief of the Bureau of Telegraphs, the chief of the Bureau of Hydrography, the chief of the Bureau of Lighthouses, the chief of the Bureau of Beacons, the chief of the Bureau of Buoys, the chief of the Bureau of Pilots, the chief of the Bureau of Harbors, the chief of the Bureau of Rivers, the chief of the Bureau of Lakes, the chief of the Bureau of Canals, the chief of the Bureau of Navigation, the chief of the Bureau of Commerce, the chief of the Bureau of Fisheries, the chief of the Bureau of Forestry, the chief of the Bureau of Agriculture, the chief of the Bureau of Industry, the chief of the Bureau of Labor, the chief of the Bureau of Education, the chief of the Bureau of Science, the chief of the Bureau of Art, the chief of the Bureau of 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